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The troubles at Columbia University arose when students supported the views of the community in a dispute with the University administration over the location of a proposed gymnasium on public park land. Its problems as an urban university in need of more land for expansion and surrounded by a deteriorating residential community are being experienced by many other American city colleges and universities. But, while Columbia was minimally involved with its neighborhood, other urban institutions have taken the lead in rebuilding their communities. The massive efforts of 2 other prestigious multiversities--the University of Chicago on Chicago's South Side and the University of Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia--are examples of what can be done to better the urban environment and prevent the development of hostile relations between an urban university and its neighborhood. (JS)

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LEADS COLUMBIA COULD HAVE FOLLOWED

By

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Leads Columbia Could Have Followed

By George and Patricia Nash

New York June 3, 1968

"... While Columbia has allowed Morningside Heights to decline and has virtually ignored Harlem, other urban universities have taken the lead in attempting to rebuild their neighborhoods ..."

It is interesting that the troubles at Columbia arose because the students supported the community in a dispute with the university administration over the location of a proposed gymnasium on public park land.

Columbia's problems with its neighborhood, which have been caused by its need for more land for expansion and the deterioration of the surrounding residential community because of urban blight, have been experienced by many other urban universities in the period since World War II. However, while Columbia has had relatively little to do with its neighborhood—allowing the once graceful Morningside Heights to decline, and virtually ignoring neighboring Harlem—many other urban universities have taken the lead in rebuilding their own neighborhoods. Let us look at what two other prestigious private multi-universities—the University of Chicago on the South Side of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia, have done to rebuild their neighborhoods. Chicago's $200 million program, which is now nearing completion began in 1950. Penn's plan—based on Chicago's experiences, now in the full bloom of construction, began in 1957.

Most of Chicago's efforts have been through an organization of private citizens—the Southeast Chicago Corporation (SECC), which was created by the University in 1952 and has been headed since its inception by Julian H. Levi, professor of urban affairs at Chicago.

The university is located in the Hyde Park-Kenwood area and is adjacent to the Woodlawn area, a black slum. To date, most of the renewal effort has been concentrated in the Hyde Park-Kenwood area. Both the university and the surrounding Hyde Park-Kenwood areas are now satisfying places in which to live and work—satisfying both architecturally and sociologically. The university itself, since its founding with a large grant from John D. Rockefeller in 1890, has always been attractive with its basic units of ivy-league Gothic construction. The setting is one of wide, tree-lined streets and the campus is located on both sides of the Midway, the site of Chicago's fair. The most famous building on the campus—Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House—has been joined in recent years by new buildings by Mies van der Rohe, Eero Saarinen and Edward Durrell Stone, to make the University of Chicago an architectural showplace. Most of the students live on or near the campus and 70 per cent of the faculty live within a 20-minute walk.

The Hyde Park-Kenwood area urban renewal appears to be a success. Faculty members who make their home in this community told us they enjoy living there. Hundreds of new town houses have been built. There are numerous new high-rise apartment buildings. Many apartment houses and private homes have been renovated. Some streets have been closed at one end to reduce traffic hazards for children and to discourage motorists from using the area as a thruway. The urban renewal plan has also helped to assure that shopping and entertainment facilities, already good, would be improved. There are restaurants for all tastes, and also coffee houses and theatres. There is a huge cooperative supermarket. The Harper Court Foundation has opened a $600,000 shopping center with a potter, a candle maker, a repairer of stringed instruments, several art galleries, an art shop and an interior decorator among the tenants.

The entire urban renewal project as currently planned will come to about $200 million, to which the University itself has contributed $30 million. Public funds will amount to approximately $50 million. In addition to its capital contribution, the university spends about $400,000 a year on a security force which augments the Chicago Police Force in patrolling the Hyde Park-Kenwood area.

The history of Chicago's involvement in the community showed at the outset the same sort of indifference that has been exhibited by Columbia. Since the days of the first World's Fair, Hyde Park has been the Greenwich Village of Chicago. The Kenwood area was an area of stately homes. The university's trustees and administrators took the stand through the '30s and '40s that the university's business was teaching and research rather than community involvement. For a long time the university, hotel owners, and residents of the area were successful in resisting the black migration. However, during and after World War II, slumlords and blacks began to move into the neighborhood. Apartment buildings were cut up to house five times as many residents as they had been planned for. Real estate owners made money by "block-busting" (convincing home owners to sell in belief that the area would soon become all black).

Because of the decline of the neighborhood and of several other factors as well, the University began to have serious trouble attracting both faculty members and students. Undergraduate enrollment declined from 3,200 to 1,300 by the early '50s. The university trustees seriously entertained the idea of moving the campus to a safe suburban location.

The first effort to be made was done by faculty members and residents of the area, who formed the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference in 1950, when $127 was collected at the first meeting to plan community rehabilitation. The Conference set up a number of standing committees manned by volunteers who made official complaints to the City of Chicago in cases such as those of illegal conversion of apartment houses. This attempt to use legal remedies was not effective. Cases were brought to court, but they dragged on for months. Slumlords, if convicted, got off with small fines. Meanwhile, slum buildings continued to be created at a rapid pace. The Conference took a militant position on civil rights which kept it from enlisting the full support of many of the home owners of the area.

When Lawrence Kempton became chancellor of the university, he decided

Drawing by Burt Silverman

that the University itself must act. The Southeast Chicago Corporation was formed and a staff recruited which included not only Julian Levi, the director, but also Don T. Blackiston, a criminologist, and Jack Meltzer, a planner.

Blackiston began to accumulate files on every building suspected of being a trouble spot. Once it was determined that something illegal was going on, immediate action was taken. If criminal activity was suspected at a bar, the university's connections were used to reach the insurance companies insuring the property and the bank holding the mortgage. In certain instances this caused enough pressure to have the building sold to reputable owners. When a slumlord would take over a building and begin illegal conversion, SECC would threaten legal action and the university would offer to buy the property. SECC became involved in three basic activities: halting the spread of blight through the accumulation of facts and direct, immediate confrontation with lawbreakers; by causing the enactment of laws to bring about urban renewal; and the planning of the area.

Chancellor Kempton, the first president of SECC, sat down in his shirtsleeves and worked with neighborhood planners on a regular basis. The present president of the university, George Beadle, is now the president of SECC, which has a board of directors of approximately 75, with a 21-man executive committee and a budget of about $50,000 a year, with the largest contributor being the university.

The whole process would probably not have been possible if the university had not maintained good relations with the City of Chicago to insure the City's support. The original understanding between Chicago's then Mayor Kennelly and the university, which resulted in the area being designated as an urban renewal area, was mediated by James Downs Jr., a university trustee and important figure in Chicago real estate.

The success of the program can be measured in fairly objective fashion. The crime rate is one of the lowest in the city. In 1953, 5 per cent of all Chicago's crimes were committed in the area and the figure is now less than 2 per cent. The vacancy rate in rental housing is less than 2 per cent. The market value of old homes has risen. Savings and loan associations are willing to lend money to prospective home owners. Hyde Park Federal Savings and Loan, with assets of over $8 million, came into being as a result of a large citizen effort to provide mortgage money for anyone wanting to move into the community, regardless of race. Despite general success, however, there have been setbacks and there are still many problems. Worse yet, many critics of the urban scene charge that the university failed to involve members of the community in the planning and engaged in "black renewal."

To expand its own facilities, the university has turned to the adjacent Woodlawn area, which lies south across the Midway. Woodlawn has been primarily a black slum. Some have claimed that it is an Ellis Island receiving blacks who have just arrived from the South. There is a large degree of transience and a high crime rate. On the northern edge of Woodlawn, the university is building its new South Campus. The university wanted to take over the northern part of Woodlawn, which is one block deep and about a mile wide. Its plan was blocked by militant Saul Alinsky's grass-roots organization—TWO (The Woodlawn Organization). TWO and the university have had a number of major disagreements and have not succeeded in arriving at a close working relationship. SECC has just begun to try to upgrade the Woodlawn area, but a number of its proposals have been blocked.

The university's and SECC's relation to blacks from the area warrants some discussion. Between 1950 and 1956, 20,000 whites left the Hyde Park-Kenwood area and 24,000 blacks moved in. This brought the total population of the area to its highest point in recent history—76,000 people. Of this number, blacks constituted 38 per cent. Although the present population has declined to about 55,000, the proportion of blacks is the same as it was ten years ago, before urban renewal—38 per cent. The university has attempted to recast the racial situation in class terms. It welcomes stable, middle-class blacks; but urban renewal has specifically attempted to move out blacks with poor education and low-ranking employment. As comedian Mike Nichols explained it: "This is Hyde Park, whites and blacks, shoulder to shoulder against the lower classes." There are now many black home owners.

One of the major complaints has been that the university and SECC have been interested in results and not in enlisting citizen participation in planning or explaining their method of operation. Julian Levi has been accused of being imperious. There were loud complaints when he refused to meet with a group of black mothers who wanted to discuss the university's plans in Woodlawn. He would not even explain why he wouldn't meet with them. The students at Chicago who have been involved in a number of programs designed to let them help and get to know the black residents of Woodlawn on a person-to-person basis feel that they have a much better understanding of the situation than do university officials.

The University of Pennsylvania, aware of the fact that Chicago has been criticized for not involving local citizens sufficiently and not doing a good enough job of communication, specifically attempted to avoid these pitfalls. An incident that occurred in 1956 led to the active involvement of the university with its community. A Korean graduate student at Penn was kicked to death by a group of five or six blacks. Even with such a dramatic event to awaken the community, it took several years before any action was forthcoming. In 1957 and 1958 there were conferences with community representatives. In the following year the men responsible for the university of Chicago's neighborhood renewal program were brought to Penn for three days of discussion. In the summer of 1959 the West Philadelphia Corporation (WPC) was established with Penn's leadership, but four other institutions in the area were also responsible for its founding. In addition to the University of Pennsylvania they were: the Drexel Institute of Technology, the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science and the Presbyterian Hospital. President Gaylord Harnwell of Penn was made the president of WPC and executive officers from the other three institutions were named vice presidents. WPC also has 25 directors, including officials of the four institutions, representatives of industry, law and the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority. There are also several heads of neighborhood organizations on the Board of Directors, including local black citizens.

Early in 1960, Leo Molinaro, a philosopher by training and a community organizer and university administrator by background, became the executive vice president of WPC. A volatile speaker and an energetic listener, Mr. Molinaro is still the principal figure in the organization.

Although WPC's land acquisition policies have upset the members of the community who will be displaced, Mr. Molinaro has won the respect of the community because of his willingness to discuss matters and because of the positive things that WPC has done for the community.

As Mr. Molinaro sees it, WPC has had four specific goals: to coordinate the land needs of all the institutions in the area into one unified urban renewal plan; to make the area into a community of scholars and a better place to live for scholars and manual workers alike; to improve the local schools, and to make a contribution to the city. To this end the University City Science Center has been created and companies whose operations are primarily clerical have been recruited.

The first thing that was done was to rename a 14 by 12 block area "University City." WPC has been successful and the name has caught on. It is now used by real-estate firms and companies in the area.

A survey of the entire area was completed and it was determined that ten per cent of the land area in University City was occupied by buildings which should be cleared, that another 65 per cent of the

land area was occupied by structures in need of extensive rehabilitation, and about 25 per cent of the land area was either open or occupied by structures of excellent quality and merited conservation. The area contiguous and immediately to the north and west of Penn and Drexel was designated for urban renewal. It was divided up into five urban renewal areas covering approximately 200 acres in total. Approval on the five areas has been proceeding independently. In some areas the Federal funds have already been received while disputes by the NAACP, CORE and SNCC have slowed others.

Many hearings and discussions were held with local residents. These resulted primarily in the alteration of time tables rather than changes in the actual plans for land acquisition. Urban renewal regulations and the university's wish to maintain a unified campus led to the selection of areas immediately contiguous to Penn and Drexel. Mr. Molinaro now feels that there might have been considerably less opposition from the community if some of the better blocks had been left and a small amount of hedge-hopping had been done. Community leaders felt that university facilities should have been more dispersed.

At the time it was drawing up urban renewal plans to accommodate the expansion of institutions in the area, WPC was also working to improve the area. A comprehensive plan for parks, greenways, and walkways has been prepared by the local citizens with the help of a landscape architect. There will be walkways which will include standard decorative street furniture. There will be a complete replacement of signs, lights, benches and bus stops. Work has already started on several vest-pocket parks.

University City is fortunate in that it is not a slum of the type surrounding the University of Chicago on the north and on the south. The homes are largely single family and many were built after World War I. Some are detached and some adjoin each other in long stretches of row houses. Many of the residents are black, but a large portion of them have lived in Philadelphia for many years. The style of construction has made upgrading a comparatively easy task.

WPC has gotten rehabilitation projects under way in two of the five neighborhoods. In one, 600 structures were certified for FHA insured rehabilitation financing. In the other, 1,300 structures received similar certification. In each of these areas a substantial amount of individual rehabilitation has gone on. University City dwellings are now known as town houses. It is still possible to buy a row house for less than $15,000 which can be updated into a town house.

On a booklet commissioned by WPC to promote the project, there is a cover showing the design from a Victorian fence. The text on the inside cover reads as follows:

Like ancient Athens, University City is an urban place where human culture may flourish and grow from the individual talents of its citizens. But unlike Athens, people of every race, from every corner of the globe have come to dwell in University City. Instead of a city-state, it is fast becoming a city-world. Like the finely detailed Victorian fence, the quality of life in University City is attractive because of its rich variety. The city is a place of contrasts, where a plumber can live comfortably in the same neighborhood with an internationally known scholar; and plumber or scholar can find the kind of house in which he feels at home.

The building of community spirit and the instilling of people with the desire to improve their neighborhoods have been made possible only by the employment of a number of specific tactics by Mr. Molinaro and WPC. For example, WPC realized that an essential part of improving a community is the uplifting of its schools. Of the 7,000 students in University City public schools, only 10 per cent are faculty children. The university does not operate an elementary or high school of its own; therefore, the public schools are potentially quite important in the education of faculty children. WPC has done a number of things to improve the schools:

1) Libraries in the public schools were found to be inadequate. Drexel agreed to give training to librarians and all of the schools in the University City area now have librarians and libraries.
2) WPC has worked to stimulate the growth of Parent-Teachers Associations at the schools. It has sought to involve Penn and Drexel faculties as well as local residents in the affairs of the schools.
3) An extensive effort has been made to spot students with college potential and to get them enrolled in colleges. Testing done on ninth grade students by Drexel spots disadvantaged students who seem promising. Students thus identified were allowed to volunteer for the three-year motivation program (called the "M" Program). The M Program seems to be a success. Of the 122 students who graduated from high school in the spring of 1966 and participated in the program, more than half were accepted in college. There are approximately 500 students enrolled in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades now taking part in the program. WPC has decided that the goal is to get the students into college, not necessarily Penn or Drexel. Penn does not make special allowances for students in the M Program who would not otherwise be qualified. This means that most of them go to other colleges.

WPC has made a conscious effort to help the city by improving the tax yield from University City. The university is very sensitive about the fact that it pays no taxes and, like many other universities, has done much to show the city that it is an economic as well as a cultural asset.

The thing that impresses people about Penn's efforts has been that they have generally been accomplished with an aura of good feeling. Challenges from the community have generally been met positively. Last summer, when there were disturbances in a black slum outside of the immediate university area, Leo Molinaro met with the residents to find out what the university could do to help. There are now 120 young black men and women attending leadership training classes at Penn. In April a crisis arose when a black physician who owned an office building on the edge of the campus was accused of refusing to hire a superintendent because he was black. Black students from the university immediately picketed on behalf of the man who charged discrimination, and the West Philadelphia Corporation applied muscle to get him hired for the job he was originally denied.

Despite the fact that both Penn and Chicago have been successful in renewing the areas in which they are situated, there are still many potential sources of conflict with neighboring black residents. Each are elite institutions intellectually, as is Columbia. This means that there are few black students who are able to make the grade academically. All three institutions engage in extensive recruiting of black students and offer qualified students almost unlimited financial aid—most of which is federal. This is a serious source of conflict. However, it can be somewhat overcome, as has been done at Penn, by helping black students attend college elsewhere if they are not able to make the grade at Penn.

Chicago has a Center for Continuing Education on campus which is used by local and national leaders alike for conferences and meetings. There have been a number of programs at the Center specifically to train indigenous leaders.

An expanding urban university with high academic requirements is bound to incur the wrath of its neighbors. The future of a university is threatened when its environment deteriorates and becomes hostile. Penn and Chicago have made massive efforts to renew their communities and to show local black residents that they are interested in their problems. Columbia's environment is basically dull and deteriorating. A large proportion of the faculty lives in suburbia and hence are not truly members of the community. The situation could be changed, but it will require a massive effort and a long time. ▬